

THE RĀMĀYAṆA MYTH OF POETIC CREATION

*Rāmāyaṇa* is the *Ādikāvya* of the Sanskrit literature. It is an immortal *Kāvya* and was blessed to be so by *Brahmā*, the creator himself.

*Yāvatsthāsyanti girayaḥ saritaśca mahītale /  
Tāvadrāmāyaṇakathā lokeṣu prācariṣyati //* (VRā. 1.2.3b)

We find the myth of the creation of this *Ādikāvya* in the first two *Sargas* of its 1st *Kāṇḍa*. The ascetic *Vālmīki* asks *Nārada*, the best among the Saints (*Muniśreṣṭha*) about a man who has an integrated personality and is endowed with all possible virtues of a perfect man.

*Ko 'nvasminsāmprataṃ loke guṇavān kaś ca vīryavān /  
Dharmajñaśca kṛtajñaśca satyavākya dṛḍhavrataḥ //  
Cāritreṇa ca ko yuktaḥ sarvabhūteṣu ko hitaḥ /  
Vidvānkaḥ kaḥ samarthaśca kaścaikapriyadarśanaḥ //  
Ātmavān ko jītakrodho dyutimān ko 'nasūyakaḥ /  
Kasya bibhyati devāśca jātaroṣasya samyuge //* (VRā. 1.1.2-4)

These are rare virtues to be found together in one human being, but *Nārada* does not disappoint *Vālmīki*. There does exist a man who is *Sarvagūṇasampanna*, respected and adored by all. He is *Rāma*, the scion of the *Ikṣvāku* race.

*Nārada* leaves after singing the praise of *Rāma* and *Vālmīki* is left alone with his disciple *Bhardwāja*. He then goes to have a dip in the river *Tamasā* not far from *Jāhnavī*. *Vālmīki* then just strayed about surveying the deep extensive forest at the bank of the *Tamasā* and is captivated by the sight of two chirping *Krauñca* birds dallying in

amorous sports. And then while Vālmīki was looking at the Krauñca pair, a sinful fowler pierced to death the male bird. Vālmīki was overcome with compassion and grief and his heart cried forth:

*Mā niṣāda pratiṣṭhāṃ tvam agamah śāśvatīḥ samāḥ /*

*Yatkrauñcamithunādekamavadhīḥ kāmamohitam // (VRā. 1.2.15)*

What was this sudden outpouring of heart, – a ray of light or a string of beauty in words, – what a magic. Even Vālmīki could not know and repeatedly asked himself, – what was it uttered by me out of sorrow for the bird.

*Tasyaivaṃ bruvataścintā babhūva hṛdi vīkṣataḥ /*

*Śokārtēnāsya śakuneḥ kimidaṃ vyāhṛtaṃ mayā // (VRā. 1.2.16)*

After contemplating on it he realized that the words he uttered were of equal feet and of even measure and were capable of being sung in accomplishment to a stringed lyre (*vīnā*): it must be a *śloka*. Then Vālmīki took bath in the Tamasā and started back for the hermitage followed by his disciple Bhardwāja with pitcher full of water and pondering all the way on the same matter.

*Tameva cintayannarthamupāvartata vai munīḥ // (VRā. 1.2.20)*

After reaching the hermitage he sat down and his mind was fixed in contemplation (*Dhyānāvasthita*). And then there came the four-faced luminous Brahmā, the creator of the universe. Vālmīki stood up immediately and bowed down to Brahmā with folded hands and was greatly surprised. He worshipped Deva with Pādya, Arghya and Āsana. Brahmā took his seat and made Vālmīki to sit down. Then with Brahmā sitting by his side, Vālmīki's mind went back again to the sad fate of the female bird and while thus absorbed in thought he quite automatically repeated the verse in grief. But in this contemplation, Vālmīki is not alone. On the seat of mind Brahmā and the poet are seated together, then Brahmā revealed to him:

*Śloka eva tvayā baddho nātra kāryā vicāraṇā /*

*Macchandādeva te brahmanpravṛtてyaṃ sarasvatī // (VRā. 1.2.31)*

«A *śloka* has been composed by you; no more thinking regarding this. Through my wish alone, Oh Brahman, has occurred this outflow of the Divine Speech». Brahmā asked Vālmīki to relate the life of Rāma as he had heard from Nārada, – including all that was hitherto known or unknown. Whatever had been omitted by Nārada, that would also come to his pen at the time of writing, Brahmā told him.

This myth of the creation of *Rāmāyaṇa* is the myth of the poetic creation. The inexplicable essence of poetry and the mystery of the flowing radiance of poetic inspiration are two such factors that cannot be directly perceived and understood. The source of the poetic inspiration has remained mysterious even to the poets. The poetic creation takes place at a very special moment in a very unexpected way and as one cannot see a cause-effect relationship in the process, a divine principle is sought as the source of it. The question of the aesthetic moment of creation has been discussed in the Indian and the Western poetics.

There are two main images in this myth. First is the moment of the poetic creation (*Sarjanā*) and the second is the moment of the contemplation (*Anvikṣā*) on the process of the poetic creation. The poetic creation takes place at the bank of the Tamasā and the place of contemplation is the *āśrama*. The prominent symbols occurring in this myth are the Tamasā river, the killing of the Krauñca bird, the resultant grief, the utterance of the *śloka*, Brahmā and his desire to create, – and the most dominant of all, rising like the tiding wave is, *Śokaḥ ślokatvamāgataḥ* – The grief alone has been transformed into the *śloka*. The Tamasā reminds one of the Ṛgvedic creative process, *Tamo āsit tamasā guḍhamagre'praketam salilaṃ sarvamā idam*.

The point from which arises the lustrous flash of the poetic words wearing the divine robes of immortality is hidden somewhere in the deeper layers of human mind. Ānanda K. Coomaraswamy referring to the *Chāndogyopaniṣad* VIII, 1, 1-3 says that «the *antarhṛdayākāśa* “space in the heart”, is the totality of this ideal space at the innermost core of our being, where only the full content of life can be experienced in the immediately experienced; that content, from the point of view of aesthetics, is “Beauty”, from the point of view of epistemology “Truth”, and from the standpoint of ethics “Perfection”»<sup>1</sup>. The waters of Tamasā have been described as

*Akardamamidaṃ tīrthaṃ bharadvāja niśāmaya /*

*Ramaṇīyaṃ prasannāmbu sanmanuṣyamano yathā //* (VRā. 1.2.5)

1. A.K. COOMARASWAMY, *Transformation of Nature in Art*, New York, 1934, p. 174.

Every word has a very special significance. A *tīrtha* is that which helps to transcend. *Tīryate'nena iti tīrtham: tī + √thak*. The beautiful thing about a myth is that it hides in itself the magic wand to find its deeper meaning. And here it is in the words «*Sanmanuṣyamano Yathā*» – an archetypal image of a poet's mind – unbound, pure, delightful and sublime. The waters always symbolise right from the Vedic imagery, the creative potency or life. According to Sri Aurobindo there are five absolute values that preside over the birth of Art, – spirit, life, delight, beauty and truth. One is pleasantly surprised to find the same elements patterned in different words in the first *mantra* of the famous *Jñāna Sūkta* of Bṛhaspati in the *Ṛgveda*. They having created the symbols through love and sympathy gave expression to what was most sublime, untainted and hidden in the innermost depths of the heart (*Nihitam guhāvih.*).

*Bṛhaspate prathamam vāco agraṃ yat prairata nāmadheyam dadhānāḥ /*

*Yadeṣāṃ śreṣṭhaṃ yadaripramāsīt preṇā tadeṣāṃ nihitam guhāvih //*  
(*Ṛgveda*, 10.71.1)

The word *preṇā* (*preṇā*) used in the Vedic verse is important as it gives expression to the aesthetic state of the poet's mind where the tension caused by the duality of "I" and "you" or the subject and the object is lost. This also suggests the hidden passion (*rāga*) that is inherently related to poetry. This corresponds to *karuṇa* or *karuṇaveditva* in the *Rāmāyaṇa* myth.

*Tathāvidhaṃ dvijam drṣṭvā niṣādena nipātitaṃ /*

*Ṛṣerdharmātmanastasya kārūṇyam samapadyata //*

*Tataḥ karuṇaveditvādadharmo'yamiti dvijaḥ /*

*Niṣāmya rudatīṃ krauñcimidaṃ vacanamabravīt //* (VRā. 1.2)

It was not through dialectics that the act of the Niṣāda was considered unrighteous but through *karuṇaveditva*, that is «knowledge through identity». In the piteous cry of the bird the poet heard the eternal cry of separation of the complementary dual principle of life as a result of sympathetic disposition and complete identification.

Another point suggested by the *Rāmāyaṇa* myth as well as other is lack of individual effort on the part of the poet. Rabindranath Tagore says in one of his poems that he is only an instrument and the

player resides somewhere hidden and mysterious – the deity of the mind, the *Manodevatā*:

*Āmi ki go vīṇāyantra tomāra /  
vyathāya pīḍiyā hṛdayera tāra //  
mūrcchanā bhare gūta jhaṅkāra /  
dhvanicha marma mājhe //*

and

*E ki kautuka nitta nūtaṇa ogo kautukamayī /  
Āmi jāhā kichu cāhi boli bare bolite dite cho koī //*

In the Rāmāyaṇa myth it is Brahmā's wish that inspired the *śloka* (*Macchandād eva te brahman pravṛtteyaṃ sarasvatī*). Does it symbolize the "Divine Inspiration", or Intuition, – but in any case it is mysterious and inexplicable beyond the ordinary experience of life. Moreover the "divine" is no answer as "*devatā*" is also symbolic – *Parokṣapriyā hi devāḥ pratyakṣadviṣaḥ*.

But then in the word Deva or Devatā alone one gets the answer. The word *deva* is derived from the roots  $\sqrt{div}$  and  $\sqrt{dā}$  meaning to shine and illuminate and is suggestive of knowledge, realization and penetration into a deeper meaning, a higher principle, a divine law or a universal truth behind the perceivable working of the cosmos. And *devatā* is literally the conveyor of light (*Devaṃ dyutiṅca tanotīti devatā*). God is indeed the archetype of light. (*To archetypon phos*’, in the *Corpus Hermeticum*).

In Indian poetics it is called *pratibhā* and has been discussed at length by the poeticians and the philosophers alike. Without going into details we would like to state that the term is used to express the "illuminator" and the "illumination of the poetic essence" – *Pratibhāyate'neneti*; and *pratibhānaṃ pratibhā*. It has been interpreted as *Drṣṭakāraṇavinaivākasmād vyavahitaviprakṣṭātītanāgata – sūkṣmārtheṣu yathārtha jñānasāmarthyam pratibhā* (Nāgeśabhaṭṭa on *Vibhūtipāda* 3/36).

In the Āgama literature it is called «*Samveda*». Bhavabhūti has made Brahmā to say to Vālmīki: «*Rṣe! Prabuddho 'si vāgātmani brāhmaṇi. Tadorūhi rāmacaritam. Avyāhatajyotirārṣa te pratibhā-cakṣuḥ*». And on this Virarāghava says:

*Ārṣaṃ ṛṣisambandhi yogajanyajñānaṃ cakṣuḥ netraṃ jñānamiti phalito'rthaḥ*.

This «eye of *pratibhā*», the vision through *pratibhā*, is the knowledge acquired through Yoga. Then, is this Yoga a union, a perfect identity, the seeric vision that pierces through everything with its light and reaches the very core of everything? Or shall we understand from Yoga the path of disciplining the mind to the level of highest sublimity so that the Sarasvatī may reveal itself? The nineteenth century French symbolist Arthur Rimbaud (1854-91) saw the poet as a *mage*, a seer and wrote that a poet makes himself a seer by a long, immense and reasoned derangement of all the senses («le poète se fait voyant par un long, immense et raisonné dérèglement de tous les sens»<sup>2</sup>).

In the present context Vālmiki has been called a Ṛṣi - a seer:

*Athopaviśya bhagavānāsane paramārcite /*

*Vālmikaye ca ṛṣaye saṁdideśāsanaṁ tataḥ // (VRā. 1.2.26)*

Bhaṭṭatauta says that one who is not a seer could not be a poet:

*Nāṇṛṣiḥ kavirityuktamṛṣiśca kila darśanāt.*

It is in fact an echoing of the wisdom of the Vedic age as says the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*:

*Kaviśastā iti ete vai kavayo yadrṣyaḥ.*

Some poeticians (Vāmana is the first) consider *pratibhā* as the seed of poetry (*Kavitvabījam pratibhānam*) which is explained as an inborn faculty – an impression from the previous births (*Janmāntarāgatasamskāravīṣeṣaḥ kaścit*) or it is an illumination capable of creating something of extraordinary beauty (*Apūrvavastunirmanakṣamā prajñā* – Abhinavagupta) or it is genius or creative imagination which manifests itself in ever new forms (*Prajñā nava-navonmeṣaśālīnī pratibhā matā* – Bhaṭṭatauta). Later on, the relation between the poet and his *pratibhā* was compared to that of Śiva and Śakti in the *pratibhijñāna* philosophy. Mahimabhaṭṭa compares *pratibhā* to the third eye of Śiva. In fact there can be intellectual analysis of *pratibhā*, *antarpreraṇā* or *divyapreraṇā*. The creative aesthetic experience is an internalised experience. A.I. Richards says: «Much that goes to produce a poem is of course unconscious».

Apart from this, the *Rāmāyaṇa* myth also points out certain other

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2. *Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, Princeton University Press, 1965, p. 837.

factors of importance. The epithets Vākyaviśārada, the specialist of speech and Vāgyamaḥ, controller of speech used for Vālmiki are of great significance. Vālmiki is Tapasvī. The etymological meaning of Vālmiki (*vala + mika*) is a person of refinement (*saṃskārī*) and practice (*abhyāsi*). *Pratibhā*, *vyutpatti* and *abhyāsa* all contribute towards the poetic creation but most important is *pratibhā* (*Avyutpattikṛto doṣaḥ śaktyā saṃvriyate kaveḥ* – Ānandavardhana).

The word “*chanda*” occurring in «*Macchandāt pravṛtteyaṃ brahman te sarasvatī*» means the “will” or the “desire” of the creator. It also means rhythm or metre. The creator is *kavi* himself (*kavireva prajāpatiḥ*). In the *chandas* are merged together the creative impulse and the cosmic pulse. There is complete coordination (*saṅgati*) and this lyricism is conceived in the inner feeling of poetic consciousness and joy. In the *Jaiminiya Upaniṣad Brāhman* III, I, it is said that «Initiation is called metrical transformation».

Now we come to the central point of the myth *Śokaḥ Ślokatvamāgataḥ*. As has been pointed out before that at the aesthetic moment of creativity, the poet does not retain his individual personality. The grief arising at the killing of the bird is not poet's personal grief:

*Kāvyaśyātmā sa evārthastathā cādikaveḥ purā /*

*Krauñcadvandvaviyogothaḥ śokaḥ ślokatvamāgataḥ //*

Commenting on this statement of Ānandavardhana Abhinavagupta says:

*Na tu muneḥ śoka iti mantavyam. Evam hi sati duḥkhena so 'pi  
duḥkhita iti kṛtvā rasasyātmēti niravakāśaṃ bhavet. Na ca  
duḥkhasantaptasyaiśā daśeti. Evaṃ carvanodbhūtaśokasthāyi -  
bhāvātmakakaruṇarasasamuccalanasvabhāvatvāt sa eva  
kāvyasyātmā sārabhūtasvabhāvo 'para śābdavailakṣaṇyakarakāḥ<sup>3</sup>.*

3. «It should be understood that the sorrow is not of the sage himself. Were it so, he too would be afflicted by the actual sorrow of the bird and the very dictum that Rasa (aesthetic enjoyment) is the soul of poetry would become baseless. No one afflicted with sorrow will have such a creative afflatus. Thus it is clear that the *rasa* of pathos (*karuṇa rasa*) partaking in the nature of the abiding emotion of only such sorrow as is congenial to delectation, can possibly overflow; that alone constitutes, therefore, the soul of poetry or the essence which differentiates the poetic form from all other forms of discourse» (Translation by Dr. K. Krishnamoorthy).

A person overtaken by ordinary grief can neither utter a curse nor compose a verse. It is grief arising out of sympathetic disposition; it is *Sahānubhūta Śoka*. In the process of poetic creation the poet enjoys universalized emotion and can see beyond time and space. The meaning of the word *kavi* is *krāntadarśī* (meaning endowed with transcending or unobstructing vision). What finds expression in poetry is different from the worldly experience. In this experience the microcosm and macrocosm, the heaven and earth become one and the poet catches the eternally creative rhythm. The spatial contradictions merge together in the poetic experience as is beatifully presented by the Vedic poet: *Ubhe dyāvā kāvyenā vi śaśrathe* (Ṛgveda, 9.70.2)

Another point in «*Śoka Ślokatvamāgataḥ*» is the oneness of the content and the form. The aesthetic emotion chooses its own word. «Pure intuition is essentially lyricism», says Kroche.

In the end we come to the first part of the myth. The dialogue between Vālmīki and Nārada relates the poet to the society. In reality the poet and the society could not differ with regard to their ideal. The poet and his reader both share the same social unconscious. Nārada, the knower of the three worlds, represents the society in its entirety. The three worlds, the *ksiti*, *antarikṣa* and the *dyuloka*, symbolize the standing ground, activity and a man's ideals, dreams, aspirations, etc.; and a man like Nārada is constantly moving from one region to the other, – as he has mastered the *vīṇa* – he has found the rhythm of internal and external modes of life and finds his proximity with Nārāyaṇa. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Nara* and *Nārāyaṇa* become one. That is the *yogasamādhi* of an artist and an art-appreciator in the Indian thinking; a complete identification with the object (*devo bhūtvā yajeta devam*); otherwise the seeric poetry is not possible. Vālmīki must find his information from Nārada alone. In Rāma's image one finds the eternal archetype of a man's life, – his struggles, dreams and ideals and also a constant process of achievement and loss – and ultimately returning to the centre of the whole reality; *Rāmo'haṁ sarvaṁ sahe*: the image of the human hero, looking at whom one finds the *Sākṣāt Nārāyaṇa* in human form. The Indian society has to date identified itself with the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Here ends the myth of the creation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* or the creation of poetry. *Rāmāyaṇa* moves on, but again there is a statement that



projects with clarity some other dimensions of a poet's mind and the poetic creation. The poet is himself a seer, a witness. He sees the reeling off of the events of the story as if he is watching a fruit of myrobalan on his palm:

*Tataḥ paśyati dharmātmā tatsarvaṃ yogamāsthitaḥ /*  
*Purā yattatra nirvṛttaṃ pāṇāvāmalakaṃ yathā // (VRā. 1.3.6)*